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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MADRID 001430

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: SPAIN/ETA: DESPITE RECENT GOVERNMENT SUCCESSES,
THE PROBABILITY OF AN ETA ATTACK REMAINS HIGH

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Classified By: DCM Hugo Llorens for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (U) SUMMARY: As Spaniards settle into summer vacation mode, the government, the press, and the public continue to focus on the likelihood of a significant attack by the Basque terrorist group ETA. Since ETA broke its self-declared cease-fire on June 6, the government has showed a strong hand and has enjoyed a string of police successes in capturing ETA members and seizing weapons and bomb-making material. Spanish press reports on a new Spanish National Intelligence Center (CNI) assessment that describes ETA as still having five command centers and about 70 members who received instruction in Latin America. The CNI report indicates that ETA has at least 2000 kilos of explosives and is well financed. The report says that ETA is preparing an imminent terrorist attack for Madrid or Valencia, in addition to "selective" attacks against individuals. Other government statements indicate that the attack could come anywhere, including in tourist areas along Spain's ample coastlines.
END SUMMARY.

12. (U) In the latest incident, Spanish police on the morning of July 20 continued their search for an alleged ETA member who a day earlier fled a taxi approaching a police checkpoint, leaving behind a bag full of explosives material, detonators, cables, timers, detonation cord, and mercury vials to activate magnetic bombs. Spanish press reported that this individual was allegedly on his way to carry out an attack in the historic center of Tarragona, in Catalonia.

//TIMELINE OF RECENT POLICE ACTIONS AGAINST ETA//

13. (U) July 11 - French police arrest two individuals identified as ETA's top explosive expert and an important logistical planner. The pair was found with bomb making equipment and explosives and it is suspected that the two were about to cross into Spain to provide bombs to ETA cells.

July 10 - Spanish police arrest alleged ETA member Aritz Arginzoniz Zubiarré at a bus station in Santander. Arginzoniz identified himself as an ETA member when a police officer questioned him after noticing his nervous behavior. He was carrying a backpack with a pistol, timers, and detonators. Arginzoniz is thought to have been awaiting the arrival of a car-bomb, and he pointed police to possible tourist targets in Santander.

July 9 - Four alleged ETA members arrested in Alava for street violence.

July 2 - Three ETA members arrested in France with 165 kilos of explosive material, two detonators, wire, two gas bottles, three pistols, and a rifle. The Ministry of Interior announced two days later that these individuals were planning to carry out a terrorist attack in Pamplona on either July 3 or 4, during the famous festival of San Fermes.

June 23 - Secretary of State for Security Antonio Camacho announced that 3,900 Spanish law enforcement officers would reinforce security in Spain's most popular tourist destinations throughout the summer. The operation was to employ 2,161 members of the National Police and 1,749 members of the Civil Guard.

June 22 - Spanish media reported that alleged ETA members left a rental car loaded with 130 kilos of explosive material (enough to put together eight bombs) in the town of Huelva, near the border with Portugal. The car was also loaded with detonators, timers, and one remote control. Police believe that the ETA members may have been driving the car to the popular tourist destination of the Algarve (Portugal), where they may have intended to create a support infrastructure for committing terrorist attacks against tourist interests in Andaluca. The terrorists left the car after seeing a police checkpoint along the way.

//COMMENT//

14. (C) A combination of good police work and a bit of luck has thus far allowed the Spanish government to successfully disrupt or thwart several planned ETA attacks. The government continues to believe, however, that a successful attack is essentially inevitable. The question is just how large, dramatic, and lethal the next attack will be. Interior Minister Rubalcaba told the Ambassador recently that

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a successful ETA attack is "not a question of if, but when," and the Director of the Joint Command (National Police and Civil Guard) Joan Mesquida told the DCM earlier this month that he expected ETA to try and pull off a "spectacular" attack to show its continued ability to inflict severe damage on the Spanish government.

15. (C) The effect of any successful attack on Spanish politics and national elections in March 2008 will likely be determined by the nature of the attack, and the number and nationality of any fatalities. President Zapatero, s government has taken a strong stand against ETA recently and Zapatero himself has weathered constant blistering attacks from an opposition Partido Popular (PP) that has not been able to use this issue to advance in the polls. The Spanish public--of which recent polling suggests 75 percent look favorably on dialogue with ETA if it can achieve peace--will probably give Zapatero credit for doing what he could to prevent another attack. Since ETA announced the end of the cease-fire, Zapatero has successfully made the case that he had made a genuine good faith effort to achieve lasting peace in the Basque region, but that ETA rejected the initiative and now the GOS is doing all it can to take the fight to the terrorist group. If the PP were to try to score political points from the next attack, it would risk alienating moderate Spanish voters who believe that the PP needs to close ranks and remain united on an issue of vital importance to all Spanish citizens.

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